

EXHIBIT 3
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HB 42

House Bill 42
January 15, 2009
Presented by Chris Smith
House Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, for the record I am Chris Smith , Deputy Director of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP).

As introduced, H.B. 42 is an Act Requiring FWP to establish a forest management planning process that addresses wildlife habitat enhancement; pine beetle infestation; and fire mitigation for land and property interest under the department's jurisdiction. Before commenting on the specific language of the bill, I would like to provide some background on what FWP is currently doing in relation to forest management on lands under our management.

The parks division actively manages timber stands as part of its current vegetation management practices statewide. In the past seven years, 9 sites have been thinned either as part of managing fire risk - such as Lone Pine and Lost Creek State Parks, or as part of managing overall stand health and public safety hazards where dead and diseased trees have been removed at parks like Bannack and Placid Lake. Most State Parks and FASs are of smaller acreages so projects are proportionately easier to administer.

The Wildlife Division is also actively managing forest lands on Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). For example, an EA is currently being written for a forest stewardship project on Mt. Haggin WMA. The project objectives are to conserve the bitterbrush, aspen and willow communities by slashing and logging conifers encroaching on those browse species. This effort includes harvesting beetle killed trees as well as evaluating forest stands to mitigate wild fire spread to neighboring land. The Department is working on a timber plan for Threemile WMA in the Bitterroot and developing a plan for the Ovando unit of the Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA. As the department learns how to implement Forest Stewardship type management, such activities are likely to increase.

Rather than simply requiring a planning process for all FWP lands, the department believes HB 42 would be more meaningful if the language were amended to provide direction to FWP to address fire mitigation, insect-killed trees and wildlife habitat on lands with over 50 continuous acres of forested habitat. We have discussed these amendments with the sponsor and appreciate his willingness place them on the bill.